

A
DISCOURSE,

Occasioned by the Death of

The Rev. PRESIDENT STILES;

DELIVERED IN THE SECOND CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, AT
NEWPORT.

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DISCOVER

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PROV. X. 7.

The memory of the just is blessed.

TH E character of *just* is the highest that any one can sustain. Yet it is of comparative importance, according to the station in which a person is placed. To be *just* implies a faithful discharge of the duties to which we are called. To fulfil the duties of our station, is honorable in the lowest places in life; yet some stations are more honorable: some spheres admit of more extensive usefulness; and to be faithful in these, though it expresses the same merit, implies greater honor than faithfulness in a subordinate station.

The *just* man, in addition to his usefulness, and the approbation he enjoys in life, is not forgotten in death;

but his *memory is blessed*. His labors survive him—his character is recollected—is mentioned with gratitude and respect, and imitated. The afflictive event, which will oblige us in future to consider a person of piety and usefulness, only in the light of the past, has induced me to choose at this time, as the subject of meditation *The memory of the just is blessed*; and it is my design in discoursing of the passage, to consider the character to whom it is now applied, only in his labors as Pastor of this Church. His qualifications for the important station to which he removed after leaving this Society, and in which he was employed till the close of his life, I shall not attempt to describe. To this part of his character, doubtless among those who had an opportunity of observing his conduct, and were more particularly interested in it, some will arise to do justice, and will distinguish with many a splendid and grateful tribute his tomb. But as a subject more proper and useful for us, let us consider his labors as Pastor of this Society—labors which were the principal employment of his life; a relation he was happy to sustain, and which he ever recollected with pleasure.

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The Gospel, Brethren, is so pure and perfect as to offer only mercy to the best of men. No one can say he is fully obedient to the will of God, and is entitled to his favor ; but those who appear the more blameless, and are in truth nearest perfection, are yet entirely dependent on divine grace ; *in many things they offend*, and in all are deficient. When it is said, therefore, that *the memory of the just is blessed*, the word *just* cannot be considered as denoting an absolutely perfect character ; but one who has a disposition to be obedient, and who manifests this disposition in his general conduct. The person whose memory is now in view, is not to be thought perfect. Nothing is more erroneous, or more dangerous than such an opinion of any man ; and the opinion necessarily implies at least one error, that the person who forms it is prejudiced. These remarks are not the result of envy, or want of affection ; for if the most condescending and obliging friendship command gratitude and esteem, they are due from my oppressed heart to the character of whom I am discoursing.—Whatever were his imperfections, he exhibited in a number of instances a singularly just and exemplary character, and these only our text will lead us to point out. Our

1st Observations will respect his doctrines. In the opinion of some, doctrines or sentiments are of little importance. They think the justice of them cannot be ascertained; and that a person would be better employed in making the order and peace of society his immediate object, than in discoursing of what they consider speculative and metaphysical subjects. But if the Creator of the world be invisible, and his will have an influence on the state of creation, then every thing which respects his character is of great importance; and whatever renders our opinions more just, or our affections more devout is of a practical nature, and does indeed promote order and peace in the world.

With a sense of the importance of a variety of doctrines respecting the divine nature, our deceased friend appeared very deeply impressed. These doctrines and the obligations they involved on man, he frequently represented, and inculcated. In his last address* to the Society he remarked, "The doctrine of the Trinity in Unity, the real Deity and satisfaction of Christ, with the capital principles of the great theological system of

* From this address the following extracts in this discourse are taken. The original was left with the Church.

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the doctrines of grace, have been the unintercepted faith of eight tenths of christendom from the ascension of Jesus to this day. This system I have received from God in the scriptures of truth, and on the review of my ministry I hope you will find, that I have preached the unsearchable riches of Christ, the mysteries of redemption by grace and the blood of the immaculate Lamb, the meritorious righteousness of the bleeding Immanuel." We may mention

2d. His steadiness and zeal in maintaining what he considered the peculiar doctrines of the gospel.

It was very observable he did not wish to conceal his sentiments, or to be misunderstood in the representation of them ; but that he asserted them with frankness and confirmed them by arguments the result of much study, and recommended them with a lively and persuasive zeal. His representation of doctrines showed that in his view they were important as his own salvation and that of his hearers : that he was not to be separated from them, and could not cease from recommending them. It was a language he adopted on leaving you, "God is my witness, and you have a witness

in your own breast, that I have kept the faith : and I beg leave to testify to you, as with my dying breath, that the great system of doctrines which has been the burthen of my ministry for many years past, is the pure, uncorrupted, evangelical verity. I not only believe it, but I see it; I know it to be the truth. On this I cheerfully rest my own salvation, and that of those who have heard me. This I have explained and inculcated and most earnestly recommended to you all ; and I pray God it may be preserved in my dear flock, and in the Church universal."

3d. Next to his uniformity and zeal, we may consider his attention in visiting the Society, and his more private labors and ministrations. His communicative temper, and the ease with which he adapted himself to persons in different situations and of various characters and ages, connected with distinguished humility and benevolence qualified him very much to promote the interest of religion in his visits, to instruct the ignorant, console the afflicted, reason with the erroneous, and recall the wanderer—to engage the attention of the young, and in general to communicate light and peace. His

attention in this walk of life was not confined to visiting ; but in the later years of his ministry he had repeated seasons of catechising children and servants, as well as lectures, and meetings with the Church. In each of these services he was very assiduous, and took great pleasure ; but especially in meetings with the Church he experienced unusual delight ; and the memory of those meetings is still imprinted on the hearts of a number who were interested in those pleasing seasons of christian communion. We may mention

4th. His natural friendship for the Society. The Apostle Paul, in writing to the Philippians, says—*But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you ; for I have no man like-minded, who will naturally care for your state :* in which representation he intimates, that this Minister was of an affectionate disposition—would industriously attend to their welfare, and feel a lively interest in their prosperity. An affectionate disposition was a characteristic of our deceased friend. You remember with what solicitude he observed your state ; how he rejoiced in any instances of your prosperity ; how he appreciated your expressions of

kindness to him, and considered every part of your conduct in a light the most favorable to your character, expressing the affection of a near relation, even of a Father.

5th. He was faithful to the liberty of the Churches, and in his own exercised a vigilant and prudent discipline. He appealed to you that he had "never lorded it over God's heritage;" that he had "ever left the power of the keys where Christ had placed them, with the brethren;" and that he had "been a faithful advocate for the liberties and rights of the Church." To tyranny of every kind he was a decided enemy; yet to order and government he was a sincere friend; and in his discipline of the Church expressed zeal and discretion.

6th. Finally, as a subject of the greatest importance, and the ground of all his merit, we should consider his regard to vital religion, which he frequently inculcated, and of which we have reason to believe he was an instance. He protested, "I have had a fervent longing after your eternal happiness; and have often prayed my God, that although I myself should fail of his grace,

yet that you all might be saved with an everlasting salvation. I have loved Jesus from early life. From my youth up, even from childhood, was this divine principle implanted in my puerile bosom; prompting me ever since, by prayer and deep researches, to seek after clearer ideas of his amiable character—the treasures of wisdom and excellency with which he is engloried.—Some degrees of this love I would hope have animated the general course of my whole ministry. You know from the first day that I came among you after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with many tears and temptations; and how that I have not ceased to warn every one night and day, *and have taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to you all repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ.*” That love for the Saviour which he professed and which he witnessed in love to you, as well as other good works, there is reason to believe was sincere, and that true piety adorned his character.

For more than twenty one years, viz. From Oct. 22, 1755, to March 13, 1776, he continued to minister among you in holy things; then he was obliged to leave

the place, and the Society was dispersed by the war.— Soon after having received an invitation to the Presidency of Yale College in Connecticut, and seeing no prospect of re-settlement in his former situation, he was induced to accept the invitation, and on March 19th, 1778, wrote a letter of dismissal from his Church and Congregation, circulating it among those who might then have an opportunity to see it; and intending it for the whole when they should be re-gathered.

Not to mention his sympathy with the Society in their dispersed and afflicted state, nor his confidence that they would finally return with success and gladness, his mind appears to have been peculiarly occupied with the dissolution of his pastoral engagements. In that hour he reflected on his past seasons of intercourse with you, with the same feelings that some of you reflect on his own life. The scene was too affecting to be particularly considered, and he “was obliged,” to use his own language, “to turn away his eyes while he gave the parting stroke and bore to you the tidings that he was no longer to be your minister.” For the whole Society he had a sincere friendship; but the Church en-

gaged a peculiar share of his affection, and meeting in conferences with them, and communing with them in the supper of the Lord was the most delightful part of his intercourse with the Church. "I am no more," he lamented in his address—"I am no more to break the bread of life unto you. I am no more to be conversant among you in those delightful meetings of church-fellowship in which we walked heavenward in company and took sweet counsel together ; and in which I was wont, with great delight, to edify and build you up, and to animate both you and myself in the divine life and in the road to glory. Never more do I expect in this world to enjoy such sweet and ravishing fellowship."—In a stated manner he never ministered to this Church after this dismissal. Yet in his occasional visits he witnessed the sincerity of his former attachments and their continuance. Of his death no particular account has arrived, excepting that it took place, after a short illness, on the evening of the 12th of May, that he died in the hope of a blessed immortality, in the 68th year of his age.

From his character and labors his memory will doubtless be extensively preserved in the world ; and

it will long live in this place. Scarcely a family, nor an individual here but has reason from some office of good will to remember him. Not a tree, nor a brook, nor a scene around us but has engaged his observation. In remembering him be induced to consider his doctrines and example. This is the only suitable way of remembering the *just*—the only circumstances in which they are distinguished from other men. Let not the tribute to his character consist in tears, or applauses; these often encrease the vanity of society and induce the ambitious and enterprising to seek only a name. Let us remember him in the character of virtuous, so far as he was virtuous, and imitate his example. This is the peculiar desire of ministers of the Gospel. They preach the doctrines of life, and give an example of them, and to have those doctrines believed and their example followed is ever success to their labors, and is the best, being a living monument of their characters. This is particularly intended in the expression, that *the memory of the just is blessed*.

Consider the doctrines which he inculcated with frequency and zeal, the real divinity of Jesus Christ, and

consequently the divine obligation of his commands ; the duty of repentance and faith—of walking in the Spirit and as heirs of glory, on which he so often and affectionately insisted ; consider the importance of the ordinances to which he gave you so many public invitations, and for which he used so many private persuasions, well knowing that the visible church depends upon them, and the consolation and peace which they minister. That you might attend to these subjects and be blameless, the children of God without rebuke, was the peculiar object of his desire for a considerable part of his life ; was what he besought you, as with his dying breath to observe, and will give him peculiar joy, in that world of peace and glory to which we trust he has ascended.

Where there is so general an interest in a bereavement, observations confined to particular characters, though more nearly connected with him, would be inexpedient ; such observations, therefore, shall not be attempted. Let us generally consider whatever was excellent, whatever was pure, whatever was just, or lovely, or commendable in him ; and may God sancti-

fy the bereavement by blessing his example in these respects to you and to me.

To conclude the subject, let us consider the instruction to be derived from the conduct of the faithful in general who have shone, or still shine as lights in the world. Let us look above all examples merely of a human nature, and fix our principal attention on Jesus Christ our Fore-runner and Lord. His word is the only perfect rule, his character the only perfect example for our conduct.— God grant that we may know his will and obey it; and when He who is the chief Shepherd shall appear, that we may be graciously acknowledged as his followers, and with all who are sanctified be crowned with never fading glory in the Kingdom of God, through Jesus Christ.

Now to him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy: to the only wise God our Saviour be dominion and praise, Amen.

